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AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO IMMEDIATE~~CONFIDENTIAL~~ BUENOS AIRES 9248~~EXDIS~~E.O. 11652 GDS
TAGS OR-M, CI, AR, PBOR, PDIP
SUBJECT BEAGLE CHANNEL: CHAT WITH GENERAL SUAREZ MASON

REF: 295176

1. DEPT'S CONCERN EXPRESSED IN REFTEL, PROMPTED ME TO CONTACT GENERAL SUAREZ MASON, FIRST CORPS COMMANDER, THIS MORNING AT 9 (NOV 22) TO CHECK OUT RUMORS OF POSSIBLE TAKE OVER OF SOME ISLANDS BY GOA, I MET ALONE WITH GENERAL SUAREZ MASON IN HIS OFFICE. HE WAS CALM, COOL AND COLLECTED. HIS NOTORIOUS DEVIOUSNESS WAS WELL HIDDEN BY HIS PLEASANT SMILE AND SOFT SPEECH. COMMENT: GENERAL SUAREZ MASON IS THE LEADER OF ALL LEADERS WHEN IT COMES TO MILITARY HARD-LINERS. HE DEFIES PRESIDENT VIDELA AND EVERYONE ELSE WITH HIS CONSISTENT LINE OF TAKING ON THE CHILEANS AND GETTING IT OVER WITH. I FELT IF ANYONE HAD THE LATEST SCOP IT WOULD HAVE TO BE THE FIRST CORPS COMMANDER. END COMMENT.

2. I STARTED CONVERSATION BY TELLING GENERAL SUAREZ MASON OF STRONG PERSISTENT AND SUPPOSEDLY RELIABLE RUMORS OF GOA TAKING OVER SOME ISLANDS LAST NIGHT (NOV 21). HE SMILED AND SAID THAT MAY BE THE ULTIMATE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM, BUT IT DIDN'T TAKE PLACE LAST NIGHT, TODAY NOR TOMORROW.

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PAGE 02 BUENOS 09248 222010Z

HE ELABORATED MORE BY STATING A MEETING IS SCHEDULED OF ALL CORPS COMMANDERS WITH THE PRESIDENT AND JUNTA NEXT TUESDAY, NOV 28. THE PURPOSE OF MEETING WOULD BE TO REVIEW BEAGLE CHANNEL MATTER. WITH AN AIR OF CONFIDENCE, HE SAID THIS IS CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE AN INVASION WILL NOT TAKE PLACE BEFORE TUESDAY, AT LEAST.

3. SUAREZ MASON CONTINUED BY EXPLAINING HOW HE HAD ALL KINDS OF TROOPS IN HIS GARRISON WHICH WOULD NORMALLY BE IN THE HOT SPOTS IF AN EMERGENCY EXISTED. HE SAID SOME TROOPS ARE EVEN RETURNING. HE CONCLUDED THIS PHASE OF HIS CONVERSATION BY STATING IF THERE IS A CONFRONTATION I WOULDN'T BE HERE BUT INSTEAD I WOULD WOULD BE IN HE MIDDLE OF IT.

4. THE GENERAL THEN SAID IN HIS OPINION CHILE WAS NOT ACTING IN GOOD FAITH WHEN IT MADE STATEMENTS IT WANTED TO RESOLVE THE DISPUTE PEACEFULLY. I INQUIRED WHAT HE MEANT BY THIS STATEMENT. HE REPLIED IT WAS ABOMINABLE AND UN-DIPLOMATIC THE WAY CHILE HAD REPLIED TO GOA'S PRESIDENT AND FONMIN. HE SAID CHILE TOOK ITS OWN SWEET TIME IN ANSWERING THE NOTES THEN IT PROCEEDED TO LEAK THEIR REPLY TO THE NEWS MEDIA BEFORE GOA'S FONMIN EVER HAD THE INFOR-

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MATION. HE EMPHASIZED THIS HAS ANTAGONIZED THE MILITARY AND ARGENTINE PUBLIC AS WELL.

5. HE MADE IT CLEAR TO ME THAT IF BY THE FIRST TWO WEEKS IN DECEMBER THE QUESTION IS NOT RESOLVED THE QUESTION OF MEDIATION WILL BE A MOTT QUESTION. HE SAID ARGENTINA WOULD TAKE THE INITIATIVE AND FIGHT CHILE UNTIL THE VERY END. WHEN HE MADE THIS STATEMENT HE TENSED UP AND BECAME APPARENT TO ME HE WAS WORKING HIMSELF INTO AN EMOTIONAL FRENZY. IT WAS NO BLUFF, IN MY OPINION.

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PAGE 03 BUENOS 09248 222010Z

6. I DECIDED THIS WAS THE TIME TO SAY "ADIEU". SUAREZ MASON SAID HE WELCOMED MY VISIT. HE SAID HE HOPED WE COULD MEET OFTENER AND THAT HE WAS AVAILABLE TO ME ANY MORNING IN THE EARLY HOURS.

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1 of 3

~~Document Information~~

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1 of 3